

5-10-2014

# In the Shadow of the Beast: The Impact of Aleister Crowley on New Religious Movements and Contemporary Culture

Robert Jones

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/rs\\_theses](http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/rs_theses)

---

## Recommended Citation

Jones, Robert, "In the Shadow of the Beast: The Impact of Aleister Crowley on New Religious Movements and Contemporary Culture." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2014.  
[http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/rs\\_theses/46](http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/rs_theses/46)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Religious Studies at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religious Studies Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gsu.edu).

IN THE SHADOW OF THE BEAST: THE IMPACT OF ALEISTER CROWLEY ON NEW  
RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

by

ROBERT ANTHONY JONES

Under the Direction of Louis A. Ruprecht Jr.

ABSTRACT

In late 19th century Great Britain, there was a revival of interest in the magic and occultism that emerged during the Renaissance. Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) was a product of that revival, one who has had an ironically long afterlife, despite all of the controversy that has surrounded him. Crowley should also be remembered as a significant influence upon the founders of a variety of New Religious Movements (such as Gerald Gardner and L. Ron Hubbard). There was increased interest in his work and personality that emerged several decades after his death, as evidenced by the use of his image on the cover of a Beatles album, an increase in the sales of his books, and an emerging new status as a countercultural icon.

The purpose of this study is to perform a history of the reception of Crowley's ideas, focusing primarily on the self-promotion of a "beastly" persona, his subsequent and post-humous demonization, his rehabilitation in the 1960's, his repeated demonization in the 1980's, and the fairly recent (if gradual) acceptance of his importance to the scholarly study of New Religious Movements (NRMs).

INDEX WORDS: Magick, NRM, Occult, Thelema, Aleister Crowley, Wicca

IN THE SHADOW OF THE BEAST: THE IMPACT OF ALEISTER CROWLEY ON NEW  
RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

by

ROBERT ANTHONY JONES

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2014

Copyright by  
Robert Anthony Jones  
2014

IN THE SHADOW OF THE BEAST: THE IMPACT OF ALEISTER CROWLEY ON NEW  
RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

by

ROBERT ANTHONY JONES

Committee Chair: Louis A. Ruprecht Jr.

Committee: Nadia Latif

David Bell

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2014

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Fenella Roche. During this process, she was my personal manifestation of the goddess *Kali*. To my children, Tiffani, Carlescia, Alexandra, Erique, and grandson Gregory. To my parents, Jimmy and Joan Jones. This would not have been possible without their support. And to my band and creative outlet, Mas Bagua.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Louis A. Ruprecht Jr. for his wonderful guidance and encouragement while sorting through a very complex and engaging topic. He has been an unforgettable mentor. Thanks to my committee members Dr. Nadia Latif and Dr. David Bell for their valued insight and willingness to take a look into the often marginalized and misunderstood persona and works of Aleister Crowley. For long distance consultation and inspiration, many thanks to Dr. Hugh Urban of The Ohio State University. And, to Dr. Molly Bassett for informing a class of students that it is alright to shift your scholarly emphasis while in graduate school.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>PROLOGUE: RECONSIDERATION OF THE BEAST.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 MAGIC(K), MYSTERY, AND MEANING.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2 WEAVING THE WEB.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>3 SEX, DRUGS, ROCK N' ROLL.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>4 THE SEASON OF THE WITCH.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>EPILOGUE: THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>46</b>



## LIST OF FIGURES

1. <a href="http://www.mastertherion.org/photo2.html">http://www.mastertherion.org/photo2.html</a> .....	viii
2. <a href="http://www.mastertherion.org/photo3.html">http://www.mastertherion.org/photo3.html</a> .....	8
3. <a href="http://mysteryofmystery.com/Pics/Crowley/Aleister_Crowley_06.jpg">http://mysteryofmystery.com/Pics/Crowley/Aleister_Crowley_06.jpg</a> .....	17
4. <a href="http://2.bp.blogspot.com-P7_DdDv7tJE/TojVZb7YPpl/AAAAAAAAAETk/uj9UQ6jzRtY/s1600/Aleister_Crowley.jpg">http://2.bp.blogspot.com-P7_DdDv7tJE/TojVZb7YPpl/AAAAAAAAAETk/uj9UQ6jzRtY/s1600/Aleister_Crowley.jpg</a> .....	23
5. <a href="http://113.bp.blogspot.com/qa1mzX90wsU/TojTbOx4PZl/AAAAAAAAAETc/faJmiXv14BM/s1600/Thelema_Abbey_2.jpg">http://113.bp.blogspot.com/qa1mzX90wsU/TojTbOx4PZl/AAAAAAAAAETc/faJmiXv14BM/s1600/Thelema_Abbey_2.jpg</a> .....	32
6. <a href="http://juanangeljuristo.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/fernando-pessoa-jugando-al-ajedrez-con-aleister-crowley.jpg">http://juanangeljuristo.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/fernando-pessoa-jugando-al-ajedrez-con-aleister-crowley.jpg</a> .....	38
7. <a href="http://provokingthedivine.blogspot.com/2012/09/how-enigmatic-is-the-face-thaat-looks-down.html">http://provokingthedivine.blogspot.com/2012/09/how-enigmatic-is-the-face-thaat-looks-down.html</a> .....	43



Figure 1: Edward Alexander Crowley, aka Aleister

## PROLOGUE: RECONSIDERATION OF THE BEAST

“Any publicity is good publicity.” - P.T. Barnum

The ambiguous term ‘*occult*’ has a long history of attracting both curiosity and fear. Many religious traditions contain certain esoteric elements that may be classified as occult. The term itself refers to that which is hidden or obscured, mostly pertaining to doctrine and ritual practices which are only accessible to those initiated into higher degrees within a given tradition. Occult philosophy is also associated with a less provocative term, ‘*esotericism*.’ There have been esoteric components found in religious practices dating back to ancient Babylon, Egypt, and Greece.<sup>1</sup> The Early Modern interest in occult ideas began with the so-called Hermetic traditions originating in Florence during the Renaissance period, and later found greater expression in an “occult revival” that started in France with the work of Eliphas Levi (1810-1875)<sup>2</sup>, and flourished in England from the late 1800’s through the 1920’s. This was Crowley’s milieu.

The culture, ideas, and tensions of fin-de-siècle Europe produced many notable occultists who blended popular interest in Spiritualism with Romantic notions of the contemporary relevance of early Egyptian, Greek, and Eastern religious theory and symbolism. The most influential group of this period, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, was established in 1888 by William Wynn Westcott (1848-1925) and Samuel Liddell MacGregor-Mathers (1854-1918). Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) began his journey into occultism as an initiate of this group. He was

---

<sup>1</sup> These esoteric strands were thought to be woven together in the mythic figure known as Hermes Trismegistus. He was created from the merging of the Greek god, Hermes, and the Egyptian God, Thoth. The foundational text of Renaissance Hermeticism is Marsilio Ficino’s *Corpus Hermeticum* (a 15th century Latin translation of a collection of Greek texts). See Ebeling, p. 29-31; Drury, *The Watkins Dictionary of Magic*, p. 133; Davies, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Born Alphonse Louis Constant, Levi was removed from the priesthood for teaching “doctrines contrary to the church.” He then pursued the study of magic, authoring “*Dogma and Ritual of High Magic*” in 1856. Levi coined the term “esoteric.” Crowley saw significance in the fact that he was born the same year that Levi died. 1875 was also the year that the Theosophical Society was founded by Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steele Olcott. See Wilson, p. 423-428; Cavendish, p. 31-32; Davies, p. 175-177.

perhaps the most notorious, the most accomplished, and the most influential figure that came to prominence in the early 20th century occult scene. Although extensively demonized in the media, he is also the occultist who has arguably had the greatest impact on contemporary culture and other, more popular New Religious Movements (NRMs). And yet, Crowley is generally not mentioned in the Religious Studies academic discourse on NRM's, despite being the founder of a religion known as *Thelema*,<sup>3</sup> and a profound influence on some of the NRM founders whom we do discuss. This of course, is largely due to Crowley's unseemly reputation. However, it is interesting to note that other disreputable figures are considered essential to this history, even those directly influenced by Crowley. In this thesis, I will examine the motivations and causes behind this erasure.

In the academic study of NRM's, it is the history and social context from which the groups emerge that become the methodological foundation upon which our analysis should rest. Then, our scholarly focus will be aimed primarily at the perceived innovation and unorthodoxy displayed within both the doctrine and the ritual performance of these groups, as well as at the charisma of the founders. Many of the subjects who have attracted academic interest range from the controversial (Joseph Smith), to the seemingly bizarre (Marshall Applewhite),<sup>4</sup> and even the tragic (Jim Jones). All of these figures have been discussed extensively in the scholarly literature. When considering this, attention must be drawn to the fact that Crowley, one of the most influential and iconoclastic NRM founders of the 20th century, is still often overlooked in the field of Religious Studies.

---

<sup>3</sup> The name derives from the Greek word for "will." Crowley's inspiration to use the word was a 1534 novel, *Gargantua and Pantagruel* by François Rabelais, a Franciscan monk. See Sutin, p. 126, 280; Kaczinski, *Perdurabo*, p. 128, 293.

<sup>4</sup> Founder of Heaven's Gate. The group is known for its participation in a 1997 ritual mass suicide during the passing of the Hale-Bopp comet.

The purpose of this thesis is neither to further vilify Aleister Crowley, nor to attempt to rehabilitate his reputation. Instead, I am offering a reception history intended to underscore his continued relevance in the spheres of contemporary culture and religious movements, while proposing the validity of his inclusion in the canon of legitimate NRM founders. Many of the mixed feelings that are associated with Crowley were actually the result his own desire for notoriety and infamy. The motivating factors behind this desire will also be discussed. As we will see, a number of his actions which elicit disgust, when examined from the perspective of their esoteric meaning, can appear in a very different light. Yet, my efforts are not directed toward the justification of these acts, only an investigation of their contexts and meaning. The main purpose here is not to focus on Crowley's reputation, but on his innovation, the effects of his far-reaching influence, the time and society of which Crowley was a product, and why the acknowledgement of his impact should be seriously considered when attempting to understand the cultural and religious climate of the late 19th to the early 20th centuries. Of several figures whose names were appeared many times in the sources consulted during my preliminary research on NRM's (Helena Blavatsky, Gerald Gardner, Austin Osman Spare, Rosaleen Norton, Grant Morrison, and Dion Fortune) there was one name that seemed to overshadow them all: Aleister Crowley.

As I began to investigate Crowley's life and ideas, the range of his influence became far more apparent. It was surprising to see the variety of notable figures who counted him as a direct influence, such as Jack Parsons (rocket scientist); Mary Butts (writer); Somerset Maugham (novelist); Fernando Passoa (poet); Austin Osman Spare (artist); and Jimmy Page (musician). His impact on NRMs can be seen through the role he played in the work of L. Ron Hubbard (Scientology), Gerald Gardner (Wicca), and Eugen Grosche (Fraternitas Saturni), Robert De

Grimston (The Process Church of the Final Judgment), and Genesis P. Orridge (The Temple of Psychick Youth). Later, I will examine the extent of Crowley's influence on the 1960's counterculture, comic books, Rock n' Roll music, literature, film, and the creation of several more recent religious communities.

Crowley's ideas appear to have been the result of a complex mixture of disparate and potentially contradictory cultural influences such as Faustian mythology, turn-of-the-century optimism, Bohemianism, Max Nordau's philosophy of *Degeneration*,<sup>5</sup> and the disillusionment brought on by World Wars. In many ways, Crowley can be seen as an extreme embodiment of the varied social preoccupations of his time. During his lifetime as a man with many drives and talents, Crowley had been a world-class mountaineer, chess master, poet, novelist, playwright, artist, world traveler, government agent, practicing occultist, founder of a new religious movement, and a modern pioneer in the religious use of psychedelics. Having also been untrammelled in his quest to satisfy a pronounced sexual appetite, he eventually studied ancient methods used for the re-application of those erotic energies into ritual efficacy, while creating modern forms of spirituality that attempt to re-frame the dynamics of desire and concepts of the self.

As a result of his association with what has come to be known as *sex magick*, reports of his invocation of demons, drug addiction, and proclamations of being the Antichrist, Crowley has been viewed as an egotistical, manipulative, sex-crazed, satanic drug fiend. While there are some obvious contributing factors to this image, his cultural and religious relevance cannot be reduced to such infamy. Many of the other NRM founders who are always included in the Religious Studies dialogue have not produced the same amount of literature, nor as elaborate a cosmology, nor enjoyed the range of influence, nor had as interesting a biography as Aleister

---

<sup>5</sup> Sausman, p. 40-41.

Crowley. In the subsequent chapters, I will examine his life and the distinct time and place of which he was a product. The effects of the misinterpretation of his character and works will be explored, as well as some lesser-known details of his life and work that are likely to affect common perceptions of what Crowley represents within the context of contemporary culture.

A complex and diverse personality, Crowley was quite adept in the arts of self re-creation and generating publicity. These qualities, coupled with his apparently genuine conviction of being the prophet of a new age (The Aeon of Horus), and a penchant for pushing every experiential and moral boundary, Crowley's cultural and literary presence is perhaps the most pervasive and noteworthy of any figure associated with NRM's. There are several subfields within the History of Religions field for which theoretical understanding would be quite incomplete without a serious consideration of Aleister Crowley. His life and work offer us a glimpse into the extreme expressions of both the transcendent and carnal impulses (and the systematic ritual union of the two) that are some of the hallmarks of human experience.

In order to establish a context for this study, I will begin with a brief history of magic as a conceptual category. Here I will focus on the magical practices of the Renaissance, their place within religious concepts of the time, and how these practices were believed to be distinct from witchcraft. Though the idea of magic can be traced to much earlier cultures, varied geographic locales, and cosmologies, it was during the Renaissance that distinctly modern and more systematic forms of magical practice were introduced. As I noted, Crowley's introduction to the London occult scene came in 1898, through being accepted as an initiate into the premier esoteric group of the day, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Several noteworthy organizations that formed thereafter were modeled on this order, some of them founded by former members. I will also explore what may have been the unintentionally collaborative

invention of Crowley's image through sensationalist media and his own preoccupation with shock value. Then, the effects of his influence will be followed through the notable works of those who were directly affected by their encounters with him. Further consideration will be given to the significance of his emergence as a cultural icon in the late 1960's, some two decades after his ironic death, in penniless obscurity. This, of course, is intended to open a discussion of the surprisingly wide-ranging application of his writings and image that one is able to observe today.

In the past decade, we have seen another wave of interest in Crowley, arguably more academic in nature. Recent scholarly interest in Western Esotericism (as evidenced in a surge of new peer-reviewed journals, blogs, conferences, and publications)<sup>6</sup> has included Crowley as an essential subject in the ongoing academic discussion. Most of these scholars are from disciplines other than Religious Studies, but there are a few who express the need for the subjects of Esotericism and the Occult to find greater presence in the History of Religions literature<sup>7</sup>. The purpose of this work is to strengthen the case for moving beyond a blind prejudice that seems to be the result of an intense moral judgment that is not applied as emphatically to other figures. It seems as if Crowley may have set out to inspire such extreme infamy with the intent of drawing more attention to his work in the future.

It appears as though the life, work, and reception history of Aleister Crowley serve as a window through which one might view a distinct succession of contexts that shaped 20th century conceptions of spirituality, occultism, and new religious movements. Crowley was a product of

---

<sup>6</sup> Many recent articles on Crowley and his impact have appeared in journals such as *The Pomegranate*, *Nova Religio*, and *Aries* on a regular basis. Along with recent and forthcoming biographies, chapters in books of collected scholarly essays and online academic journals such *Heterodoxology* and *Societas Magica*, the current information available on Crowley has become quite extensive.

<sup>7</sup> Most notably, Hugh B. Urban of The Ohio State University, Egil Asprem of The University of California at Santa Barbara, Henrik Bogdan of the University of Gothenburg, Alex Owen of Northwestern University, and Marco Pasi of the University of Amsterdam.



Victorian England and the Occult Revival during the Fin-de-Siècle, growing in fame and notoriety as a practitioner of ritual magic and prolific author during the first three decades of the 20th century, then falling into obscurity in the 1940's. Crowley died in 1947, still holding on to the vision of being the prophet of a New Age.

The seeds that Crowley planted seemed to germinate in the late 1960's counterculture. As the Beatles said in the song "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" (1967), "It was twenty years ago today. Sgt. Pepper taught the band to play. They've been going in and out of style, but they're guaranteed to raise a smile." From there, Crowley's impact was evident through the late 1970's. The presumably diabolical aspects of his teachings and reputation caused Crowley to become linked to the wave of Satanic Heavy Metal groups and the stories told by "survivors" of Satanic cult child abuse (most of which being later debunked) during the Evangelical *Satanic Panic* of the 1980's. Finally, at the beginning of the 21st century, Crowley has become the subject of more reasoned discussion.

The timeline to be considered is as follows:

1910-1930: Crowley's greatest fame and notoriety  
1930-1946: the decline of his reputation and death in penniless obscurity  
1960s: the Crowley revival  
1980-2005: a reaction against the 1960s, especially a religious reaction  
2005- : a more neutral and less ideological perspective on the 1960s, and NRMs

While all dated historical bookends have a certain arbitrariness, the year 2005 possesses some real heuristic and descriptive value. It seems to represent a crossroads of sorts with regard to publication about Crowley specifically, his influence on subsequent NRMs, and magic as legitimate category for the academic study of religious practice.

A number of important essays have appeared in journals such as:

*ARIES* (founded in 2000, I note essays by Jennifer Hallett and by Christopher Miles in 2006, by Egil Asprem in 2007, and by Gordan Djurdevic in 2010);

*Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* (founded in 1997, I highlight the important essay by Hugh Urban in 2012);

*Pessoa Plural* (founded in 2012, I note the essay by Marco Pasi and Patricio Ferrari in 2012);

*The Pomegranate* (founded in 1998, I note important essays by Henrik Bogdan and by Martin Starr in 2006, by Egil Asprem in 2007, by Caroline Tully in 2010, and by Mogg Morgan in 2011);

*Scandinavian Studies* (founded in 1928, I note the essay by Giuliano d'Amico in 2012);

and *Theology and Sexuality* (founded in 1994, I note the important essay by Jo Pearson in 2005).

In addition, *The Journal of Literature and Science* and *The Journal of Thelemic Studies* were both founded in 2007, with important inaugural essays by Justin Sausman and Erwin Hessle respectively.

Representative book-length studies titles that have appeared in this same time period include:

2005

Nevill Drury, *The Watkins Dictionary of Magic*

Emily Edwards, *Metaphysical Media*

2006

Gavin Flood, *The Tantric Body*

Hugh Urban, *Magia Sexualis*

2007

Florian Ebeling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus*

Dave Evans, *The History of British Magick after Crowley*

2009

Owen Davies, *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books*

Susan Greenwood, *The Anthropology of Magic*

Richard Kaczynski, *The Weiser Concise Guide to Aleister Crowley*

Gary Laderman, *Sacred Matters*

Timothy Wyllie, *Love Sex Fear Death*

2011

Nevill Drury, *Stealing Fire From Heaven*

Wouter Hanegraaff and Jeffrey Kripal, *Hidden Intercourse*

Richard Kaczynski, *Perdurabo: A Life of Aleister Crowley*

Jeffrey Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*

Grant Morrison, *Supergods*

2012

Candace Black, *Satanica Sexualis*

Henrik Bogdan and Martin Starr, *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*

Stephen Flowers, *Lords of the Left-Hand Path: Forbidden Practices and Spiritual Heresies*

James Wasserman, *In the Center of the Fire: A Memoir of the Occult*

2013

Lance Parkin, *Magic Words*

2014

Tobias Churton, *Aleister Crowley: The Beast in Berlin*

Gary Lachman, *Aleister Crowley: Magick, Rock and Roll, and The Wickedest Man in the World*

Christopher Partridge, *The Lyre of Orpheus*

Marco Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*

Clearly, the proliferation of such studies is indicative of the fact that we are entering an important new phase in scholarly research on Aleister Crowley and his influence. In this study, I will give serious consideration to the meaning and timeliness of Crowley's contributions: by looking into the wide range of reaction to his work and image; by explaining what those reactions tell us about the society of which Crowley was a part; and by suggesting what this reception history tells us about religion and spirituality as expressed in contemporary culture.



Figure 2: Crowley conducting rites with his disciples.

## 1 MAGIC(K), MYSTERY, AND MEANING

“Magic leads us to exhilaration and ecstasy; into insight and understanding; into changing ourselves and the world in which we participate. Through magic we may come to explore the possibilities of freedom.” - Phil Hine (Condensed Chaos, 1995)

Much of the controversy surrounding Aleister Crowley involves his application of magical ritual technique and the cosmology that supported these practices. Not only does the cultural context of the time in question warrant consideration, but so does the context that Crowley created, as well as his more personal views on magic. If the range of influences and the goals of his practices are examined in their particular context, then perhaps some of his actions and ideas may be viewed more sympathetically. However, my intent is not to propose justification for some of Crowley’s more notorious deeds (real or imagined), but simply to present a fair and balanced assessment of his notable contributions to contemporary Western culture, particularly in the areas of spirituality, sexuality and occultism.

The term *religion* does not contain an inherent meaning that lends itself to universal application, nor does the term *magic*. These terms are employed as general categories that may be useful analytical tools when looking into elements of diverse ritual practices and cosmologies that appear to have certain family resemblances. Crowley has probably had a more profound influence on the way that modern magic is imagined, represented, and practiced than any other single 20th century figure, he even provides us with a distinct spelling of the word, *magick*. This spelling was used by Crowley to distinguish his practices from “stage magic,” and “the ‘Magic’

that attracted ‘dilettanti and eccentrics’ who sought an escape from reality.”<sup>8</sup> His own working definition of magick was this: “The Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will.”<sup>9</sup> Always striving for concrete results, he used methods ancient and modern, sacred and profane. This approach led to experimentation that far exceeded the previous limits of his own already expansive personal boundaries and carnal preoccupations. Crowley is perhaps best known for two phrases that have been grossly misinterpreted by those who have never examined the passages in their contexts: “Do What Thou Wilt”<sup>10</sup>; and “Every Man and Woman is a Star.” By the turn of the century, Crowley was unavowedly bisexual, used psychotropic drugs, and explored Eastern esoteric traditions such as Hindu Tantrism, Yoga, Buddhism, and Taoism (he traveled to India and China in the first decade of the 20th century). When considering the 1960’s revival of interest in Crowley’s life and legend, his renewed status as a countercultural icon should come as no surprise.

Who was Aleister Crowley? What did he accomplish? Whom did he influence? What is the significance of his work and image? Edward Alexander Crowley (1875-1947) was born in Warwickshire, England. As the son of a Plymouth Brethren preacher and heir to a thriving family-owned ale company, Crowley was the product of a upper middle class Christian upbringing in Victorian England. Early on, he displayed a very curious and bold nature. His mother had referred to him as the “Beast” already when he was thirteen years old; this happened after Crowley was caught having sexual intercourse with one of the house maids.<sup>11</sup> He later

---

<sup>8</sup> Sutin, p. 6

<sup>9</sup> Crowley, *Magick: Book Four*, p. 126

<sup>10</sup> The most (in)famous and misapplied quote attributed to Crowley. It is a line from the phrase, “There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt. Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law. Love is the Law. Love under Will.” from Crowley’s “*The Book of the Law*” (1904). See Flowers, p. 248-250; Drury, *Stealing Fire from Heaven*, p. 86.

<sup>11</sup> Prior to his formal study of ritual transgression, Crowley had already displayed an interest in testing moral boundaries for both pleasure and effect. Upon entering his teens, he declared that he would become “the world’s greatest sinner.” See Kaczinski, *Perdurabo*, p.23-26.

attended Cambridge University, where he was a member of the Chess Club, Freethought Association, and the debate team.<sup>12</sup> He was also heavily influenced by James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, the work of the "Cambridge Ritualists," (Frances Cornford, Jane Harrison, Gilbert Murray) and Egyptologist Margaret Murray. Even before attending university, Crowley had studied Latin and Greek. During this time, he also changed his first name to *Aleister* (a variant of the Gaelic name for Alexander), as he felt that his given name did not properly suit him.<sup>13</sup> Upon receiving his inheritance, Crowley dropped out and left Cambridge without receiving a degree.

"Spiritualism" (communication with the dead and other spiritual entities through seances) had become popular in England and France, and as previously noted an occult revival was underway in England. While the Theosophical Society had been formed in the year of Crowley's birth (a fact that Crowley saw as significant), the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn opened its first temple in 1888. The magical practices, secrecy, initiatory rites, ancient Egyptian and Greek imagery seemed more appealing to Crowley than did the Theosophists' methods, though, Crowley was heavily influenced by Indian and Chinese philosophies and imagery, as were the Theosophists.<sup>14</sup> It must be noted that many esoteric groups were formed during this period, due to a growing popularity of forms of spirituality and occult knowledge. When referring to this period, Alison Butler states that,

In an era of immense occult and esoteric activity such an establishment was scarcely remarkable on the surface. The Order of the Golden Dawn, however, proved to be truly unique in that it appeared to have no precedent for its focus on practical and ceremonial magic. Emerging in a society accustomed to the hierarchical and secretive nature of Freemasonry,

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 33, 189, 217.

<sup>13</sup> He also felt that name "Aleister" had a more pleasing rhythmic meter. Crowley, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, p. 128.

<sup>14</sup> Weston, p. 42-44.

the ghostly realm of the Spiritualists, and the mysticism and mythology of the Theosophists, the Order of the Golden Dawn stood out for its emphasis on ceremonial magic. It was an esoteric society for practicing magicians.<sup>15</sup>

This was a persistent cultural feature in London during most of Crowley's lifetime. And, due to his newfound wealth, Crowley was able to indulge his interests fully, even to the extent of traveling to exotic locales to have first-hand contact with practitioners of various esoteric religious methodologies.

A basic understanding of the cultural context from which Crowley emerged is necessary for an assessment of his innovative contributions. First of all, this was the Victorian Era, which to this day is thought of as a period of significant sexual repression. However, there was a Romantic undercurrent that produced attractive reinterpretations of the "virtues" of hedonistic sinfulness as evidenced in Oscar Wilde's promotion of a "New Hellenism" and his admonition to "be thyself." Likewise, Aubrey Beardsley's renderings of the Greek God, Pan, inspired those who wished to move beyond the standard Christian moral framework in the search for amorality.<sup>16</sup>

In the 1890's, as the subculture of Victorian decadence gained momentum, feminism was also on the rise. Feminism and decadence were connected through a climate of repressive sexual politics, and a mutual attraction to the occult groups such as the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. According to Alex Owens, "Occultism was itself bound up with a spiritualized vision of social change that called upon those ideals of regeneration and self-fulfillment that were deeply attractive to feminists of the period, and offered a 'new' religiosity capable of outstripping the conventional Victorian association of femininity with a

---

<sup>15</sup> Butler, p. 78-79.

<sup>16</sup> Hallett, p.164. Also see Nietzsche, p. 34-37.



domesticated spirituality.”<sup>17</sup> Crowley began his involvement with occultism in this environment, while being subject to these (and other) influences. While Crowley, due to some of his own statements, at times may be viewed as misogynist, the role of women within the orders that he either belonged to or founded, were by no means marginal.

Romantic notions of Oriental “mysticism” were also woven into the fabric of English colonial culture.<sup>18</sup> The prospect of adopting “exotic” religious practices became appealing to those wishing to escape the clutches of Christian moral conservatism. This led several occult groups to begin offering access to so-called secret knowledge of the East. With this also came a rise of interest in the “Paganism” of Ancient Greece, Rome, and the British Isles, which some groups found attractive due to a more local cultural connection. Crowley eventually blended such diverse elements as the I-Ching, Kabbalah, Gnosticism, Hindu Tantra, Buddhism, Rosicrucianism, Egyptian mythology, and the Greco-Roman Pantheon as the basis for his own religion. Among the variety of esoteric groups that existed in England at the end of the nineteenth century, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was unique due to “its emphasis on ceremonial magic.”<sup>19</sup>

The group’s membership included notables such as Mina Bergson (wife of the founder Samuel MacGregor-Mathers, and sister of Henri Bergson), poet W.B. Yeats, Allan Bennett (one of the first Westerners to become ordained as a Buddhist monk), Sarah Allgood (stage and film actress), Sax Rohmer (novelist), and Bram Stoker (author of “Dracula”). Though Crowley, after his departure from the group, did retain much of their ritual theory, he decided to focus on what he considered to be practical, results-based *magick*. Thus, he adopted and developed ritual

---

<sup>17</sup> Owen, p. 87.

<sup>18</sup> King, p. 89-90.

<sup>19</sup> Butler, p. 78-79.

activity that was much more comprehensive and quite controversial when compared to other spiritual groups of his time.

The psychological aspects of magical ‘reality’ were not overlooked by Crowley.<sup>20</sup> The Will was seen as the ultimate source of magical phenomena, with instrumental entities (angels, demons, spirits) being projections within the mind.<sup>21</sup> Yet, if the Will is not enlightened, efforts to engage it in the use of magick may prove not only futile, but detrimental. “We postulate the existence of intelligences, either within or without the diviner, of which he is not immediately conscious. It does not matter to the theory whether the communicating spirit so-called is an objective entity or a concealed portion of the diviner’s mind.”<sup>22</sup> Much of the controversy surrounding Crowley came through an association with ritual sex magick and the Enochian (or Goetic) magick that had been practiced by John Dee (1527-1608), an astrologer and alchemist who had been a consultant to Queen Elizabeth. Dee used a grimoire<sup>23</sup> called the Goetia (or the Lesser Key of Solomon) for conjuring angels and demons. Crowley considered himself to be reincarnation of Dee’s assistant, necromancer and interpreter of angelic language, Edward Kelly (1555-1597).<sup>24</sup> What may be classified as “magic” can vary according to time and context. In England, there was a long history of magic being perceived as demonic, as was any ritual activity that was not sanctioned by the Church.

In the Middle Ages, the Jewish mystical teachings of the Kabbalah were reapplied by Pico della Mirandola (1463-94) when occultists of the late fifteenth century saw the mythic Hermes

---

<sup>20</sup> In *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography*, Crowley reveals how he applied the influence of William James, Sigmund Freud, and C.G. Jung to his own work. Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 19, 245, 889.

<sup>21</sup> Luck, p. 208-209, 220.

<sup>22</sup> Crowley, *Magick: Book Four*, p. 250.

<sup>23</sup> Grimoires are magic handbooks that document the experiments and results of magical ritual practices, and instructions on creating amulets and talismans. Some of these texts were rumored to have ancient origins and were sought after during the 15th and 16th centuries, when it is likely that they were actually written. There was a peak of interest in grimoires during the 17th through 19th centuries. Modern grimoires are still being produced. Guiley, 143-144; Davies, *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books*.

<sup>24</sup> Guiley, p. 84-85.

Trismegistus as the archetype for the Renaissance Magus. Pico believed that, “mastery of the Kabbalah can give a person unimagined magical skill, though a dabbler who uses the Kabbalah carelessly can be destroyed by demons...[and that] magic grounded in the Kabbalah is the only effective magic.”<sup>25</sup> The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn reintroduced the use of the Kabbalah into occult practice some four-hundred years later. Crowley also incorporated it as the basis for many of his teachings. Crowley’s flamboyance and penchant for ritual taboo caused eventual dissension with other members. W.B. Yeats while acknowledging Crowley’s talent as a poet, also considered him dangerous and perhaps even insane.<sup>26</sup>

It is also important to note that Crowley’s association with the number 666 came about after leaving the order. In 1904, while in Cairo, his wife Rose Kelly began to have revelations that led to the reception of the *Book of the Law* from the supernatural entity known as Aiwass, whom Crowley believed to be his long sought after *Holy Guardian Angel*.<sup>27</sup> Crowley tested Rose (who had no knowledge of Egyptian deities) by having her identify the god Horus in a museum. She pointed out the stelae that she felt most drawn to, and its display number just happened to be 666. Crowley then began to identify as the Beast 666, alluding to *Revelation 13:18*, further reinterpretations of the biblical images of the Beast, the Whore of Babylon, and Lucifer were to follow. It should also be noted that Crowley identified Aiwass with Satan and with Horus’ brother Seth, who is considered the ancient Egyptian equivalent to the Christian Devil.<sup>28</sup> Such

---

<sup>25</sup> Kieckhefer, p. 144-149.

<sup>26</sup> Crowley, taking advantage of division within the order, attempted an unsuccessful takeover which brought about his expulsion from the group. See Owen, p. 192; Drury, *Stealing Fire from Heaven*, p. 83; Sutin, p. 76-79.

<sup>27</sup> Crowley believed that union with one’s Holy Guardian Angel was the necessary pre-requisite for realization of the *True Will*, which was according to Crowley, “The first principle of success in evolution.” See Drury, p.86; Crowley, *Magick: Book Four*, p. 128.

<sup>28</sup> Morgan, p. 177.

claims increased his infamy and diabolical reputation, which many of the tenets of his new religion, Thelema, seem to contradict.<sup>29</sup>

Within movements that may be considered spiritual and/or religious there are notable figures who come to the forefront. These individuals often embody the combined elements of their sphere of activity to a greater extent than their predecessors, while also introducing innovations and reinterpretations that actually change the practice and the reception of the given discipline. In terms of ritual and cosmological aspects of magic and the occult, Aleister Crowley appears to be the most influential and iconoclastic figure of early 20th century. His work has since been subject to a variety of reinterpretations, with the exhaustive range of Crowley's work leading to the exhaustive range of its applications. Thus having led to both uncredited influence and unfounded claims of personal connection to Crowley. Next, I will examine the process of the promotion of his persona and the development of his new religion.

---

<sup>29</sup> Tully, p. 23.

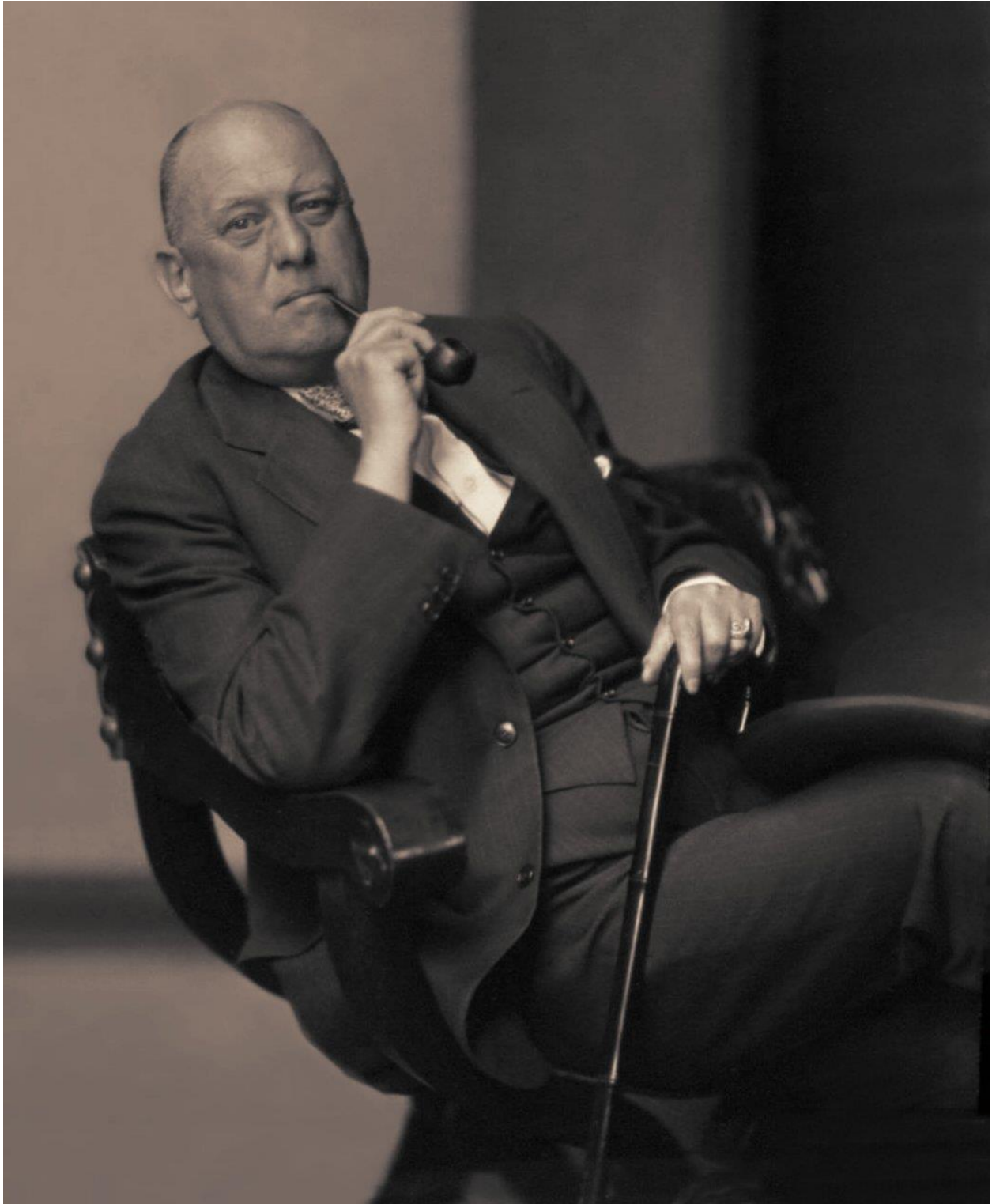


Figure 3: Crowley: The consummate man of leisure.

## 2 WEAVING THE WEB

“Magic is sometimes said to be a primitive form of science, but it is very much nearer to poetry than to even the most rudimentary science and, like poetry, it relies extensively on the use of analogy. The whole magical universe itself is built on the analogy of the human body.”

-Richard Cavendish (The Black Arts, 1967)

This chapter will explore the building of Crowley’s reputation, the forming of his persona, and the tireless social networking that insured the wide range of his influence. His many achievements, travels, and diverse social circles will be investigated and contrasted. Crowley was exhaustive in his social networking. Having extraordinary charisma, coupled with a penchant for adventure, Crowley laid a very suitable foundation of personal accomplishment and acquisition of knowledge upon which a lasting legacy could be built.

Having been considered a spiritual prodigy, he very quickly rose through the ranks of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Even establishing a faction within the organization when he perceived that its leader was no longer receiving direct communication from the group’s guiding spiritual entities known the *Secret Chiefs*. After an ill-fated attempt at a coup, Crowley departed from the group and began period of travel that would prove most essential to his quest occult knowledge. Of course, his travels led him to the East (India, Sri Lanka, China, and Egypt). Having previously climbed mountains in Tibet and Nepal as a world-class mountaineer, this journey seemed to be directed towards more explicitly spiritual aspirations.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Evans, p. 233.

From 1909 to 1913, Crowley published a semiannual periodical called *The Equinox*. It was the official magazine of the Astrum Argentum (A:.A.:)<sup>31</sup>, the first magical order that Crowley founded. Mark Morrison also notes that, “[Crowley] needed the magazine to lend an aura of scientific, and even experimental, legitimacy to his ‘scientific illuminism,’ as he styled the mission of the A.A.”<sup>32</sup> During a period in which occult publications became increasingly popular, *The Equinox* left an indelible mark on the genre. A legal dispute arose with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, due to Crowley’s putting modified versions of “secret” rituals into print.<sup>33</sup> After Crowley was initiated in the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O) in 1910, a similar dispute occurred when O.T.O. leader Theodore Reuss (1855-1923) accused Crowley of publishing secret sex magic rituals. However, upon realizing that Crowley had not been privy to this particular information, it was concluded that Crowley, through his diligence, had attained a higher level of intuition without having gone through the process of initiation. Reuss then placed Crowley as head of the O.T.O. in the U.K., with the authority to establish lodges internationally.<sup>34</sup>

Fascinated with an idealized “mystic” East,<sup>35</sup> Crowley was a true Orientalist who later gone to went to the extreme of having pictures of himself taken while wearing Indian and Chinese garments, and even giving these images names such as “Kwaw Li Ya” and “Paramananda Guru Swamiji.” In 1915, as Kwaw Li Ya, Crowley contributed a series of columns to *Vanity Fair* magazine<sup>36</sup> several years after striking up a friendship with the editor Frank Crowninshield in

---

<sup>31</sup> According to Richard Kaczinski, “The three dots arranged in the shape of a triangle is a common Masonic symbol indicating the abbreviation of a sacred word or concept.” See Kaczinski, *The Weiser Concise Guide to Aleister Crowley*, p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> Morrison, Mark, p. 18

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> See Sutin, p. 225-226; Bogdan, *Challenging the Morals of Western Society* p. 216-217.

<sup>35</sup> King, p. 92.

<sup>36</sup> Kaczinski, *Perdurabo*, p. 294-295.

1900. This was during a stay in New York City<sup>37</sup>, where he rented an apartment in Greenwich Village, before going to Mexico, and then California to establish an O.T.O. lodge. It was at this time that Crowley initiated maverick rocket scientist John “Jack” Whiteside Parsons (1914-1952) as the head of the California O.T.O. lodge. Under Parsons’ tutelage was the future founder of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, who retained some of the O.T.O. symbols, terminology, and transformative psychological techniques, later reworked as features within his own religion. In 1946 Parsons wrote a letter to Crowley, in reference to Hubbard, stating, “although Ron has no formal training in Magic, he has an extraordinary amount of experience and understanding in the field...he is in touch with some higher intelligence...he is the most thelemic person I have ever met and is in complete accord with our own principles. He is also interested in establishing the New Aeon.”<sup>38</sup> Parsons, a noted figure in the history of occultism, is also known for his role in the development of solid rocket fuel. His wife, Marjorie Cameron (1922-1995), was an artist, occultist, and actress known for playing dark, mysterious roles in art films. She was Parsons’ *Scarlet Woman* in his own version of Crowley’s *Babalon Working* sex magick rituals designed to bring about the apocalypse that would usher in the Aeon of Horus.<sup>39</sup>

Another student of Crowley’s during this time was the noted London artist, Austin Osman Spare (1886-1956). Known for his realistic portraits and nude renderings, Spare (at age 17) was the youngest artist to have works on display at the Royal Academy of Art. He pursued a growing interest in occultism, as well as Hindu and Buddhist Tantra, finally contacting Crowley through a mutual friend. After a brief tutelage, Spare developed his own occult theory based on a system of creating *sigils* (talismanic symbols)<sup>40</sup>, the regulation of KIA (life force similar to *chi*

---

<sup>37</sup> Sutin, p. 81-82.

<sup>38</sup> Urban in Bogdan and Starr eds., p. 339.

<sup>39</sup> Butler in Metzger ed., p. 206; Weston, p. 106-111.

<sup>40</sup> Baker, p. 91-92; Morrison, Grant in Metzger ed., p. 18-21.



or *prana*), and a subconscious style of “automatic” drawing.<sup>41</sup> Spare is also considered the father of Chaos Magic, a form of magic founded by Ray Sherwin and Peter Carroll in the 1980’s in London.<sup>42</sup> The NRM known as *Discordianism*<sup>43</sup> (centered around the Greek goddess *Eris*) was a predecessor to the Chaos Magic movement. Both groups acknowledge Crowley and Spare as having been significant influences.

From 1905 until the early 1940’s Crowley produced an impressive number of books on the subjects of ritual theory, magick, and yoga. He also wrote novels (*Diary of a Drug Fiend*, *Moonchild*) and plays. A biography was published in 1930,<sup>44</sup> as well as his collected works and essays. Crowley drew quite a following from the British upper classes, as did most other esoteric orders. Pursuit of the occult seemed to be a preoccupation that appealed mostly to a segment the elite. And Crowley, due to his wealth and assertiveness, appears to have felt perfectly at home in these circles. He networked extensively in artistic and literary scenes, even inspiring works by those who were not particularly fond of him. Writers Somerset Maugham (*The Magician*, *The Razor’s Edge*) and Dennis Wheatley (*The Devil Rides Out*) created diabolical characters based on Crowley. Maugham was introduced to Crowley by a mutual friend. He found Crowley both repulsing and fascinating, due to his perception that Crowley was a complete self-fabrication.<sup>45</sup>

In 1920, Crowley and Leah Hirsig (his Scarlet Woman at that time) founded the Abbey of Thelema in Cefalù, Sicily. It was set up as a commune and a center for the study of magick. Crowley covered the wall with murals that depicted spiritual realms, supernatural beings, sexual

---

<sup>41</sup> Baker, p. 115.

<sup>42</sup> Morris, p. 303-304; Evans, p. 354-358; Davis, Erik in Metzger ed., p. 142.

<sup>43</sup> Whose holy book is the known as the *Principia Discordia: Or, How I Found Goddess, And What I Did To Her When I Found Her*. Written by Malaclypse the Younger (Gregory Hill) and Lord Omar Khayyam Ravenhurst (Kerry Thornley). See Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, p. 234.

<sup>44</sup> P.R. Stevenson’s “*The Legend of Aleister Crowley: Being a Study of the Documentary Evidence Relating to Campaign of Personal Vilification Unparalleled in Literary History*” (1930).

<sup>45</sup> Crowley, “*Confessions*,” p. 615-617; Sutin, p. 105-106; Freeman, p.16-28.

imagery and cryptic messages.<sup>46</sup> The residents of the village grew suspect when they learned of Crowley's identity. With the sight of followers decked in robes and sounds of late night incantations, rumors started to circulate. Hirsig presided over many of the ritual activities, with Crowley taking on a submissive role. He took himself well beyond his previous applications of ritual transgression,<sup>47</sup> while employing severe meditational practices, along with very liberal use of drugs and sex. Several visitors came for instruction in Thelemic philosophy and to participate in rituals designed to bring them into communion with their Holy Guardian Angel.<sup>48</sup>

After a series of unfortunate events (his girlfriend's miscarriage, disenchantment due to extreme austerities, a bloody confrontation, and the death of a disciple), the community that was falling apart, was now being expelled by Mussolini's government and the European press was quick to demonize Crowley.<sup>49</sup> Although he did enjoy a brief period of influence in the Berlin art scene during the early 1930's, Crowley had spent the last of his fortune. Through the generosity of a few close friends, Crowley was able to spend to last years of his life in a boarding house. Though he still produced work, he died in obscurity, addicted to heroin, penniless, and lonely.

---

<sup>46</sup> Sutin, p. 278-281.

<sup>47</sup> Djurdjevic in Bogdan and Starr eds., p. 122-127.

<sup>48</sup> Sutin, p. 284; Kaczinski, *Perdurabo*, p. 358-362.

<sup>49</sup> Sutin, p. 303-309; Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 935-942.



Figure 4: A dapper dandy

### 3 SEX, DRUGS, ROCK N' ROLL

“He [Crowley] was expounding a theory of self-liberation... I’ve employed his system in my own day-to-day life... The thing is to come to terms with one’s free will, discover one’s place and what one is, and from that you can go ahead and do it and not spend your whole life suppressed and frustrated.” -Jimmy Page (guitarist of the band, Led Zeppelin)

Two decades after Crowley’s death, there was a resurgence of interest in his life and works.<sup>50</sup> In 1967, free love, free thought, psychedelic drugs, Eastern religions, and occult imagery colored the cultural landscape from London’s Carnaby Street to San Francisco’s Haight-Asbury district. Several of the preoccupations and excesses of the late 1960’s had parallels with the lifestyle and mindset of Crowley. His image (at the urging of John Lennon) was used on the cover of the Beatles’ “Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band” album, which set new standards for modern recording technology and creative artistic expression in popular music. This seemed to serve as a catalyst that contributed to Crowley’s post-humous designation as a counterculture icon. A wide range of artists became fascinated with Crowley, musicians in particular. Many of his ideas found their way into expressions of the so-called ‘*Dawn of the Aquarian Age*’ through Rock n’ Roll music, along with a variety of esoteric reinterpretations of Western occult and Eastern religious thought. This era saw a greater number of novice experiential adventurers as compared to Crowley’s time. It seemed as though occultism had become mainstream.

---

<sup>50</sup> The work of Kenneth Grant who was Crowley’s student and personal secretary greatly contributed to this. Grant had archived Crowley’s unpublished works, produced magickal texts of his own, and began republishing many of Crowley’s works in late 1960’s. Perhaps in reaction to the resurgence of interest in the occult. Grant served a very similar role for Austin Osman Spare. See Evans, p. 306-307; Weston, p. 191; Flowers, p. 269-272.

The use of sex, psychoactive substances,<sup>51</sup> and music in ritual activity can be traced to antiquity, as evidenced in many shamanic and tantric rites which may also include the consumption of what may be considered in some contexts to be transgressive pollutants (alcohol, sexual fluids, forbidden foods, human flesh and excrement), along with the implementation of gender-bending, psychodramatic performance, and journeys into the underworld.<sup>52</sup>

The popular music scene during the rise of 1960's counterculture served as a platform for occult imagery and ideals, mainly due to the fact that many artists were exploring these themes in their personal lives, thus reflecting it in their forms of artistic expression. Even the mythology of the musician who makes a pact with the Devil in hopes of fortune and fame had a strong comeback at this time. The Rock n' Roll of the 1950's was a hybrid of Rhythm & Blues, Jump Music (a derivative of Swing), and Country & Western. In the early 1960's many young British musicians became obsessed with American Blues recording from the 1930's to the early 1950's.<sup>53</sup> This was music that had long been associated with Faustian myth through the legend of Robert Johnson (who allegedly sold his soul to the Devil for talent and fame), and lyrics that made reference to the supernatural uses of roots, *mojo*, and "black cat bones."<sup>54</sup> Many of the Rock n' Roll performers of the 1960's and 1970's maintained personae that were larger than life, while enjoying both massive concert attendance and extraordinary record sales. These facts only served to make the myths surrounding these figures more believable and attractive.

It appears that during the late nineteenth century, in spite of Victorian repression, there was an undercurrent of fascination with sexuality and exotic forms of eroticism.<sup>55</sup> Occultism provided a suitable justification for the implementation of ritual sex acts, presenting an "erotic pathway to

---

<sup>51</sup> Schultes and Hofmann, p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> Taylor, p. 107-109; Svoboda, p. 171-180; White, p. 67-68.

<sup>53</sup> Knowles, *The Secret History of Rock 'n' Roll*, p. 84-85; Davis, p. 14-15.

<sup>54</sup> Patterson, p. 7-10; Davis, p. 5-6.

<sup>55</sup> See "Repressive Hypothesis" in Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol. I*, p. 10-12.

wisdom,”<sup>56</sup> many of these being fashioned from certain elements of Hindu Tantra. Through the process of colonization, India had become romanticized as the mysterious “other” in the English imagination. Although Crowley was not the first Englishman to claim knowledge of tantric techniques of ecstasy and enlightenment, he was perhaps the Western world’s most vocal and visible exponent of Tantra in the early twentieth century. Hugh Urban has stated that, “many European men and women of the late nineteenth century, it would seem, were working through their own deep ambivalence surrounding sexuality and religion; and they found in Tantra a wonderfully ‘other’ form of spirituality—a kind of empty mirror onto which they could project their own most intense anxieties, fears, hopes, and forbidden desires.”<sup>57</sup> While tantric practices were only marginally sexual, these components seemed to be the most attractive to curious Westerners.

The modern system of *sex magic* (as well as the term itself) started with the work of Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825-1875),<sup>58</sup> a black American whose teachings were later implemented by groups such as *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor* (neo-Rosicrucian) and *Ordo Templi Orientis* (which Crowley joined, and eventually headed). Randolph viewed orgasm as being the opening through which magical intent could be channeled for the desired outcome to occur. But, he felt that this would only work if ritual coitus was performed by a married couple who were in love. Orgasm outside of this framework was thought to be inefficacious.<sup>59</sup> Crowley took this concept much further to include the use of prostitutes, masturbation, and homosexual intercourse. In his 1913 article “Energized Enthusiasm,” Crowley suggested that “divine consciousness” could be

---

<sup>56</sup> Uždavinys, p. 78.

<sup>57</sup> Urban in Hanegraaff and Kripal eds., p. 104.

<sup>58</sup> Deveney in Hanegraaff and Kripal eds., p. 357-358.

<sup>59</sup> Drury, *Stealing Fire from Heaven*, p. 103-104; Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, p. 65-71.

realized through “the sacramental use of the sexual act.”<sup>60</sup> Much of Crowley’s infamy is in relation to his sexual appetites as expressed in some rituals. He has often been considered depraved and perverted, perhaps due to a lack of information regarding the history of ritualized sex as a vital component found in a variety of religious practices,<sup>61</sup> and the Victorian attitudes regarding the secrecy of sexuality.<sup>62</sup> Ironically, the “secrecy” that was most likely a response to “repression”, seemed to encourage a kind of sexually charged subculture in which bordellos, pornography, and burlesque shows attracted a significant following. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Crowley was not only at the vanguard of London’s esoteric/occult scene, he had also been active in the European art scene as a novelist, poet, and painter. Crowley’s artistic works were often inspired by personal experiences involving drug use, occult ritual, and spiritual revelation.

Much of the 20th century fascination with the relationship between sex and spirituality was directly influenced by Crowley. Although he was not the originator of these concepts, his innovation and personality led to what was arguably most effective representation of these themes. In the summer of 1911, Crowley wrote his first “sex magick” treatise called *Liber Stellae Rubeae* (The Book of the Ruby Star) in which the star ruby represents the *lingam* (the Tantric phallus). This book, which was deemed holy by Crowley, “was [his] first formal ritual expression of the dynamics of sexual magic. His primary influence was not Indian Tantra, but rather that strand of the Western esoteric tradition that interpreted alchemical symbols in sexual terms and believed in the possibility of a *summum bonum* or philosopher’s stone being created,

---

<sup>60</sup> Drury, p. 103.

<sup>61</sup> Djurdjevic, p. 89-90.

<sup>62</sup> For an overview of Victorian attitudes of “secrecy” regarding sex, see Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion*, p. 55-59.

on a physical level, by the esoteric preparation and admixture of sexual fluids.”<sup>63</sup> While Crowley did incorporate Tantric and Yogic elements into his ritual activity,<sup>64</sup> his primary sex ritual was known as “Babalon Working.”<sup>65</sup> The spelling of the name *Babylon* was altered to give it more numerological power.<sup>66</sup>

Crowley had reinterpreted the significance of the “Beast” and the “Whore of Babylon” from the New Testament Book of *Revelation*, with himself playing the Beast and his “Scarlet Woman” playing the Whore of Babylon. This of course, would be taken as an admission of association with the Devil, but Crowley seemed to have a very personal interpretation of these scriptures. After his 1904 experience with the supernatural entity Aiwass, Crowley believed himself to be the prophet of the coming *Aeon of Horus*, and *Babalon Working* was thought to be the prescribed ritual method for the introduction of a spiritual offspring that would initiate, “The Aeon of Horus [which] is the duration of the Apocalypse, that period when Choronzon<sup>67</sup> shall rule over the cosmos and visit destruction upon mankind. And the Apocalypse is a mental transformation that will occur, or is presently occurring, within the collective unconscious of the human race.”<sup>68</sup> It would appear that much of Crowley’s cosmology was constructed upon the self-awareness of a what could be considered an inner “mindscape.” In many cases, he described demons and angels as mental constructs<sup>69</sup> and the Apocalypse as a mental state. According to Crowley, to operate on the *Astral Plane*, and to interact with entities thought to reside therein, one must develop the ability to appropriately navigate the mental terrain despite the risks involved.

---

<sup>63</sup> Sutin, p. 216;

<sup>64</sup> Djurdjevic, p. 86; Crowley, *Magick: Book Four*, p. 170-172, 638-640.

<sup>65</sup> Owen in Bogdan and Starr eds., p. 24; Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, p. 136-137.

<sup>66</sup> Crowley, *Magick: Book Four*, p. 424.

<sup>67</sup> A demonic entity that Crowley invoked in a ritual in Algiers. Kenneth Grant later linked the demon to author H.P. Lovecraft’s *Cthulhu* mythos, and created his own Typhonian Order of the O.T.O. See Evans, p. 306-307, 338-340; Drury, p. 107-109, Lachman, p. 198-200.

<sup>68</sup> Tyson in Metzger ed., p. 194-195.

<sup>69</sup> Or as “an intelligible image of his own true Will.” Kaczinski, “*Concise Guide to Aleister Crowley*,” p. 39.



The Astral Plane—real or imaginary—is a danger to anybody who takes it without the grain of salt contained in the Wisdom of the above point of view; who violates its laws, either wilfully, carelessly, ignorantly, or by presuming that their psychological character differentiates them from physical laws in the narrower sense; or who abdicates his autonomy, on the ground that the subtler nature of astral phenomena guarantees their authority and integrity.<sup>70</sup>

This idea of exploring astral planes became very popular in the late 1960's psychedelic subculture. It was considered to be one of many methods that could be applied to direct and frame the psychedelic experience. Perhaps the most visible spokesman of this period was former Harvard psychology professor and researcher, Timothy Leary. Known for the phrase “Turn on, tune in, drop out”, Leary, in a televised interview (now posted on YouTube), claimed to be carrying on the work of Crowley, who had allegedly done the same. In the 1980's, Leary became an initiate of the *Illuminates of Thanateros*, a group (an inner circle) started by the founders of Chaos Magic, who saw themselves as carrying on the work of Crowley's pupil, Austin Osman Spare.

Sexual freedom and experimentation, mystical experience through meditation and/or drugs, contemporary reinterpretation of ancient religious symbolism and practices, along with visions of apocalyptic new age regeneration all have been strongly associated with the 1960's; they were major factors in Crowley's lifestyle many years prior. Being a product of his time who pushed all of the boundaries, Crowley may have expressed a cultural and religious potentiality that the first half of the century was not ready for. Even the participants in the 1960's counterculture may not have been ready for it, as evidenced in the implosion and disillusionment that occurred as it ended.<sup>71</sup> Hugh Urban informs us that, “Crowley serves as a kind of allegory of twentieth-

---

<sup>70</sup> Crowley, *Magick: Book Four*, p. 502.

<sup>71</sup> Lachman, *Turn of Your Mind*, p. 1-6.

century civilization and foreshadows what would follow in the decades after his death. Shepherd notes that Crowley's attack on established institutions, his will to transgress all laws, and his dream of a utopian new world personified many of the excesses and contradictions of our own contemporary American culture."<sup>72</sup> In the 1970's, Jimmy Page, the songwriter/guitarist of Led Zeppelin (second only to the Beatles in terms of total record sales) amassed the largest collection of Crowley memorabilia and Austin Osman Spare artwork in the world. He even purchased the house that Crowley once owned at Loch Ness, which was the site of the infamous six month long *Abramelin*<sup>73</sup> ritual. Copies of the album "*Led Zeppelin 3*" even had "Do What Thou Wilt" pressed into the vinyl.<sup>74</sup>

Crowley's legacy exhibits a multidimensionality that continues to attract interest regardless of changes in social climate. Despite being called *The Great Beast 666* and "the wickedest man in the world," Crowley never considered himself a Satanist, though his name and legacy have consistently been thought to be connected to it.<sup>75</sup> In the musical genre known as Black Metal or Death Metal, liberal use has been made of Crowley's image, words, and religious symbols. He is often seen as the Devil's emissary through iconic appeal to the darker side of the religious imagination.<sup>76</sup> Though few Rock n' Roll fans may have considered themselves explicitly religious, the liminal state produced by the live concert, the transformative experience of listening to the recordings, and the deification of the performers display all of the elements of a

---

<sup>72</sup> Urban, *The Beast with Two Backs*, p. 21.

<sup>73</sup> The arduous Abramelin ritual is an invocation of angels, (allegedly translated from Hebrew into French by Eliphas Levi) which if performed improperly, may invoke demons. See Wilson, p. 463-463; Sutin, p. 53-54; Crowley, "*Confessions*," p. 177-192.

<sup>74</sup> Wall, p. 197-198, 228.

<sup>75</sup> An early 1970's mass market paperback edition of "*The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*" features the publisher's description of its contents on the cover. It states that the book is, "The profane and uninhibited memoirs of the most notorious magician, satanist, and drug cultist of the 20th century." This of course, was an attempt to sensationalize the subject, thus perpetuating the darker side of the Crowley mythos while insuring good sales.

<sup>76</sup> This can also be seen in the number of "evil" fictional characters that have been fashioned after Crowley by authors such as Somerset Maugham, Ian Fleming, Ira Levin, and Dennis Wheatley.

kind of free-form religion.<sup>77</sup> And, the phrase, “Do What Thou Wilt” seems to be the movement’s most appropriate mantra.

---

<sup>77</sup> Partridge, p. 236-241.



Figure 5: The dilapidated Abbey of Thelema

#### 4 THE SEASON OF THE WITCH

“His [Crowley’s] true place in religious history, as opposed to that in the history of magic(k), may be as the godfather of Wicca rather than as the father of Thelema.”

-Ronald Hutton

Crowley was the founder of a religion known as Thelema, which still has a following. But, his presence is largely felt throughout the world of contemporary witchcraft.<sup>78</sup> Though many practitioners of witchcraft have chosen to distance themselves from any association with Crowley, several elements of these practices can be traced directly to him. This fact was perhaps intentionally downplayed by some of the foundational figures of Modern Witchcraft, so that Crowley’s reputation would not become a stumbling block in the path toward mainstream acceptance.

As Gerald Gardner (1884-1964) was laying the foundation for modern witchcraft, the laws against such practices were being repealed,<sup>79</sup> and his associate Doreen Valiente was seeking validation for witchcraft as a recognized religion. It was toward this end that she suggested to Gardner the avoidance of any association with Crowley, although several key ritual techniques and use of a *‘Book of Shadows’* had been direct imports from Crowley’s methodology.<sup>80</sup> There has been much debate regarding the extent of Crowley’s influence on Wicca, because Gardner had left the O.T.O to start his own group, and Crowley’s own negative opinion of “witch cults.” Yet the facts surrounding Gardner’s brief, but noteworthy, association with Crowley should not

---

<sup>78</sup> Luhrmann, p. 33; Hutton, p. 171; Pearson, p.33.

<sup>79</sup> Adler, p. 43-44.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 60-62.

be overlooked.<sup>81</sup> Gardner had been actively researching the available information on early Paganism in Great Britain and claimed to have been initiated into a coven in 1939, a decade before meeting Crowley.<sup>82</sup> Crowley initiated Gardner into the O.T.O. and commission him to operate a new lodge. A few years later, after attracting only a very small group of disciples, Gardner decided to leave the O.T.O., started his own coven, and called the practice *Wicca*.<sup>83</sup>

Wicca and Neopaganism both claim ancient Celtic roots. Anthropologist Margaret Murray's work *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921) included claims of an unbroken pre-Christian lineage that could be linked to Roman worship of the horned god Janus (or Dianus). It was asserted that remnants of this Dianic Cult still existed as an indigenous English tradition. After being subject to much scrutiny, the claims were largely disputed. However, the seeds were planted for a revival of interest in ancient paganism and Early Modern witchcraft. Of course, in English antiquity, those traditions were associated with the Devil, again due to their non-Christian ritual activity and cosmologies.<sup>84</sup>

Crowley saw himself as being part of what he called Hermetic and Enochian lineages. His forms of magic were decidedly cosmopolitan, as opposed to rural folk magic. He also viewed himself as the prophet of a new age, a modern magician, not as an ambassador for the archaic. Yet his impact on modern witchcraft is undeniable. Not only had Gardner (whose teachings became known as *Gardnerian* witchcraft) been a disciple of Crowley's, but Alex Sanders (founder of *Alexandrian* witchcraft) made an unfounded claim to have received a direct blessing from Crowley as a child. This seemed to be a ploy to gain credibility through being associated

---

<sup>81</sup> Morris, p. 281; Evans, p. 49; Greenwood, *The Encyclopedia of Magic & Witchcraft*, p. 190.

<sup>82</sup> Drury, p. 181.

<sup>83</sup> Guiley, p. 134.

<sup>84</sup> Adler, p. 44-46.

with Crowley.<sup>85</sup> Though Crowley claimed no connection with witchcraft, his “magickal” legacy appears to have had the greatest effect on the way that it has been perceived in modern culture and its portrayal in popular media.

The relationship between notions magic and witchcraft has a very complex history. In the Middle Ages, there were laws established that recognized a difference. Witchcraft was always associated with the Devil, its ritual activities and results were not part of the Christian cosmology; another god was recognized, therefore its power was believed to be demonic.<sup>86</sup> Occult practices outside the context of witchcraft was considered a natural science related to astrology, alchemy, and medicine.<sup>87</sup> Those practices were deemed useful to those in power, so allowances could be made for these practices if properly sanctioned. As long as no alternate god was acknowledged and no malicious or self-serving intent was involved, such magic was not considered demonic.

It should be noted that many so-called witches were not invoking demons or worshipping the Devil. The infamous legends of the *Black Mass* and the initiatory *Devil's Kiss* (to the hindquarters) were inventions of Christian polemicists eager to condemn and persecute.<sup>88</sup> Ironically, these rites were later implemented by opposition groups who used Satanic practices as a form of protest against the Church.<sup>89</sup> It can be said that all witches performed magic, but not all magicians were witches.

Many modern Satanic groups do not consider the Devil to be a “real” entity. He is thought to be a symbol of free-thought and self-determination, so much of the Satanic constituency uses

---

<sup>85</sup> Hutton, p. 330-331.

<sup>86</sup> Adler, p. 44-46.

<sup>87</sup> Tambiah, p. 24-27; Styers, p. 28.

<sup>88</sup> Black, p. 10-11, 37; Guiley, p. 99-102; Waite, p. 32-33.

<sup>89</sup> It is common for marginalized groups to lay claim to names in practices over which others condemn them. See Cavendish, p. 329-332; Masello, p. 24-27.

atheist rhetoric when articulating their philosophical stance. Church of Satan founder Anton LaVey (1930-1997) claimed no connection to Crowley at all, but his definition of magic seems quite similar to Crowley's. In the chapter of the Satanic Bible titled, *The Theory and Practice of Satanic Magic*, it is stated that, "The definition of magic, as used in this book, is: The change in situations or events in accordance with one's will, which would, using normally accepted methods, be unimaginable."<sup>90</sup> And, with its emphasis on indulgence, rebellion against blind faith, and the use of *Enochian Keys*<sup>91</sup> as a method to invoke entities which are actually latent powers of the mind, this work exhibits more Crowleyan influence than LaVey was willing to admit.<sup>92</sup>

Even much of the ritual protocol used in the Church of Satan strongly resembled rites performed by both Crowley and Gardner. So, as we see, the two most popular occult religions of the late 20th century (both still having a visible cultural presence today), while admittedly very different, were both impacted by the work of Aleister Crowley. These connections (and many others), previously denied and/or ignored, have more recently become the subject of scholarly focus. Examination of Crowley's impact suggests even more depth to his legacy than previously acknowledged, much of this resulting from his association with particular strands of religious cosmologies and practices that are collectively referred to as the *Left-Hand Path*.<sup>93</sup>

Alternative practices of this kind have usually been focused on particular supernatural beings within the given pantheon or cosmology that are considered adversarial, destructive, deceptive, and sexually active. The Egyptian deity, Set (or Seth), lord of the underworld and brother of

---

<sup>90</sup> Crowley's definition of magick was: "The Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will." See Crowley, *Magick: Book Four*, p. 126.

<sup>91</sup> Tyson in Metzger ed., p. 192-193; Grant, p. 103-105.

<sup>92</sup> Crowley's influence was part of the construction of modern Satanism, but there is no evidence that he thought of himself as a Satanist. See Dyrendal in Bogdan and Starr eds., p. 370; LaVey, p. 110.

<sup>93</sup> Svoboda, p. 182-186; Flowers, p. 7-9; Drury, *Stealing Fire from Heaven*, p. 125; Evans, p. 222-228.



Horus, who opposes him and rapes him, is one example. As are any Greek gods associated with intoxicants (Bacchus), the underworld (Hades), or madness (Dionysus).<sup>94</sup> Even Orpheus would fall into this category because of the effect that his music had on the inhabitants of the underworld. Indian deities such as Kali and Shiva are also the focus of so-called Left-Hand Path practitioners, as are Tibetan “wrathful” deities like Mahakala, as well as the mythological “tricksters” that appear in various archetypal cultural frameworks.

Of course in the Western context, the Christian Devil would be a prime candidate, along with certain Pagan deities who were demonized throughout Christianized Europe. Practices associated with the Left-Hand Path are often noted for the use of particular reinterpretations for seeing that which is generally considered evil or forbidden as being the opposite side of the totality of god. It is believed that, through this understanding, a complete spiritual and psychological integration may be achieved. And as expected, these methods seem to appeal most to those inclined to break the rules. These methods have always been present within esotericism and the occult. Crowley was a product of a time when these religious cosmologies gained a significant new following, he also stood out as a figure who took them to their limits,<sup>95</sup> and as a religious and ideological innovator.

---

<sup>94</sup> Flowers, p. 67-69; Otto, p. 145-151.

<sup>95</sup> Biographer Lawrence Sutin says, “that Crowley had created a disagreeable reputation for himself. Blessed with fortune, little practical acumen, and still less tact, he wasted little time in establishing himself as a daunting, even frightening figure with the occult milieu of fin de siècle London.” See Sutin, p. 64.

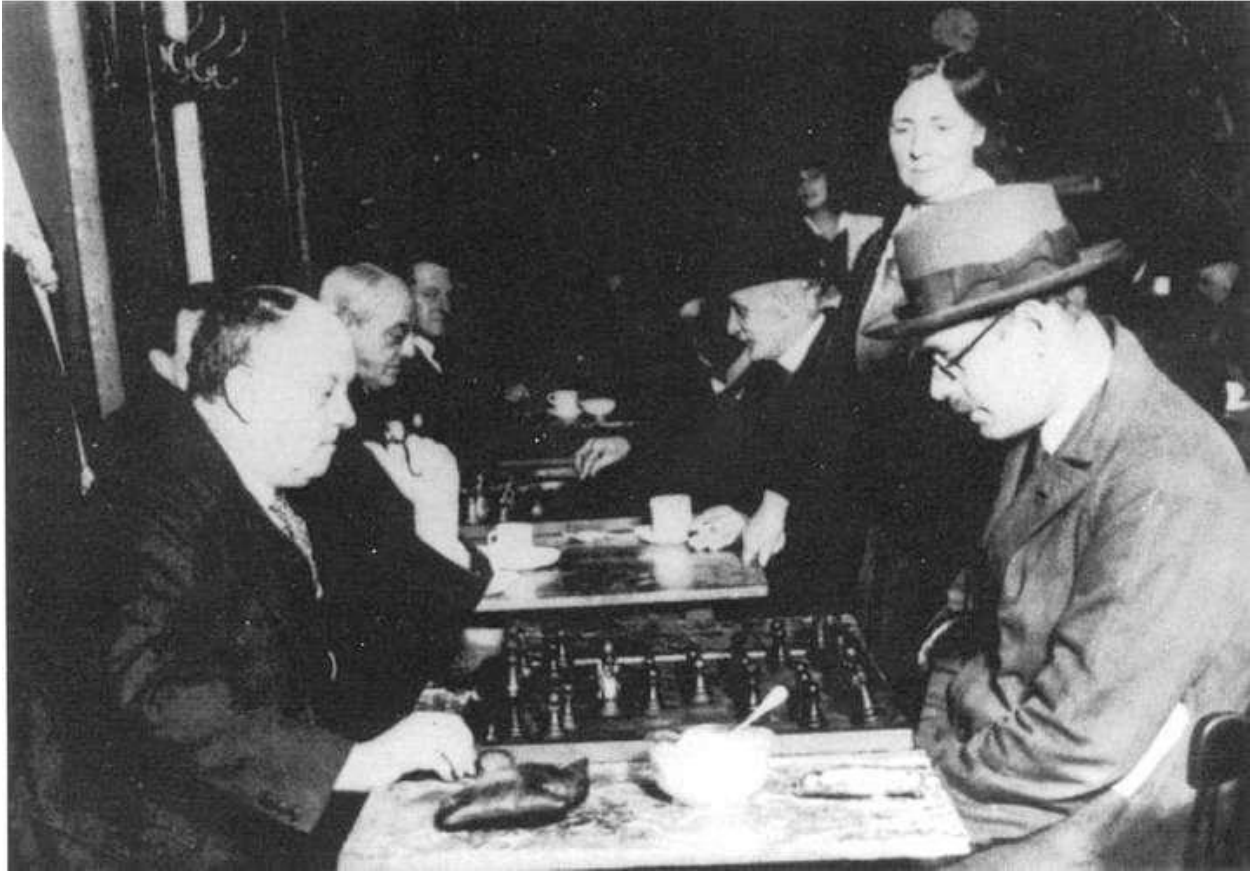


Figure 6: Crowley enjoying a game of chess with Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa

## **EPILOGUE: THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS**

“The future exists first in imagination, then in will, then in reality.”

-Robert Anton Wilson (Prometheus Rising, 1983)

What does Aleister Crowley’s lasting influence tell us about contemporary culture and forms of spirituality? To this day, his legend and lore still draw interest and spark controversy. The mention of his name seems to evoke fear and disgust in some, while inciting fascination and praise from others. Perhaps he was an embodiment of the impulses and imagination of his time; perhaps he was ahead of his time. His blending of the occult, ritual magic, yoga, and tantra quite possibly planted many seeds that sprouted in the late 60’s and are blooming now. Even within current cyber-culture there seems to be a greater assertion of will, and a greater sense of self-creation, with representations of Crowley’s ideas and image having a notable continued presence. Crowley, if anything, was one of the foremost figures of the 20th century who led the charge toward some of the social, religious, and sexual freedoms that we enjoy in the 21st century.

The contradictory statements and personal misgivings of Aleister Crowley often draw the most attention. The intensity of his personality and notoriety of his exploits may incite curiosity that would reveal more sides to this very complex individual. The primary goal of this thesis has been to present examples of the relevance and range of Crowley’s work and influence, with the suggestion that it is deserving of more attention in the area of contemporary religious history and culture. There are many biographical facts were not included in this work that may have lent support to some of my assertions; this is not meant to be a comprehensive biography, but an

examination of specific aspects of Crowley's life and legacy. Some readers may assume that I have intentionally presented my subject in more favorable light, hoping to influence opinions regarding his self-styled persona. Crowley may be excluded when discussing NRM's due to his being either misinterpreted or misunderstood, or for fear of introducing an element of volatility or deviant influence. The question is whether reluctance has led to avoidance that has produced a deliberate omission of Crowley's presence from academic religious history.

My primary goal has been to dispel some the biases that may cause the historical significance of Crowley to be overlooked. There appears to be a need to separate the popular discourse from the scholarly discourse, and then to find common ground. The popular interpretations of Crowley may always be sensationalized (he himself had a lot to do with that). Sensationalism has been insured by many of his own deeds that have proven to be very attractive to certain segments of counterculture and the arts. However, the recent scholarly interest in the history of Western esotericism has reinterpreted the role that Crowley has played in the development of contemporary ideas about spirituality and religion.

Reinterpretations and revisions are central to the work of the scholar. And while Crowley was obviously the product of very particular influences, he has also proven to be a continued source of inspiration whose effects have been remarkably far-reaching. As Jeffrey Kripal once stated, "The guy just never goes away."<sup>96</sup> Perhaps Crowley's presence has been so persistent due to the fact that he was one of the most iconoclastic figures of the early 20th century. In an era of rapid and monumental perceptual shifts, he was able to present ancient modes of religious ideology in a manner that was decidedly modern. Many aspects of his lifestyle and teachings certainly foreshadowed the dramatically shifting social and spiritual viewpoints of the 1960's.

---

<sup>96</sup> Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*, p. 17.

The Aeon of Horus may have been Crowley's prophetic vision of the so-called *Age of Aquarius*. And, Thelema may present a method of religious philosophy that is even more contemporary, as his interpretation of the apocalyptic *Antichrist* was seen as a catalyst that would spark a move beyond what he considered misrepresentations of the Christian apocalyptic cosmology.<sup>97</sup>

Crowley even claimed that the Law referred to in the phrase-- "Do What Thou Wilt shall be the whole of the Law. Love is the Law. Love under Will"-- is the very same Law that was the original message of Christ. Concerning this he stated, "It is the Law that Jesus Christ, or rather the Gnostic tradition of which the Christ-legend is a degradation, attempted to teach; but nearly every word he said was misinterpreted and garbled by his enemies, particularly by those who called themselves his disciples."<sup>98</sup>

During his own time and beyond, the image of Aleister Crowley represented a violation of the conventional and the quest to uncover the hidden. The allure of all things esoteric and forbidden has probably been woven into modern culture more through Crowley's work and legacy than by any other single factor. This is evidenced by his enduring presence and the diverse manner in which it continually shows up<sup>99</sup> ("the guy just never goes away"). On the internet, it can be seen in very informative and extensive websites such as *thelemapedia.org*, *lashtal.com*, and *hermetic.com*. He is a regular presence in scholarly journals such as *Heterodoxology*, *Paranthropology*, and *The Pomegranate*.

Crowley's likeness, quotes, and ideas have even shown up the works of two of the most successful award-winning comic books writer of all time, Alan Moore and Grant Morrison.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> Weston, p. 118-120.

<sup>98</sup> Crowley, *Magick: Book Four*, p. 445.

<sup>99</sup> The image of Crowley has been linked to conspiracy theories(Illuminati), The rapper known as Jay Z owns a clothing company called *Rockafella* that sells "Do What Thou Wilt" hooded sweatshirts, and a satirical 2012 presidential campaign called "*Crowley 2012*" started a website that features a picture of Barack Obama wearing a Crowley campaign t-shirt.

<sup>100</sup> Parkin, p. 284-285; Kripal, p. 171; Morrison, Grant, p. 315-316; Knowles, *Our Gods Wear Spandex*, p. 199-202,

Both have been lecturing at universities and conventions for many years, almost always citing Crowley as a major influence. In the past decade, groups that have formed at places like, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, the University of Bristol, Colorado State University, and the University of Pennsylvania are producing blogs and journals on Western Esotericism, in which Crowley's work and impact are constantly being re-examined and appreciated. Even the currently popular television series *Supernatural*<sup>101</sup> has featured two recurring, very powerful demonic characters named "Alistair" and "Crowley."

Though his sexual persona carries with it the connection of controversy and immorality (and to some, actual evil), these things silence enquiry for those who are unable to separate the thinker from the thought. Some of the contradictions, cryptic analogies, and shocking statements that are present in his works may seem to validate the avoidance and dismissal of Crowley as a serious subject for scholarly research. However, the undeniable impact, the lasting presence, the impressive body of work, and his status as both a cultural icon and NRM founder should not be overlooked. Aleister Crowley provides us with a window through which we can examine the complexities of 20th century expressions of morality and spirituality, and also a mirror that may reflect the ambiguities of morality and religion that become signifying components of the 21st century.

---

204-205; Green, p. 751.

<sup>101</sup> Created by Eric Kripke. Noted for its attention to detail in the representation of folklore, mythology, demonology, religious symbolism, and occultism.



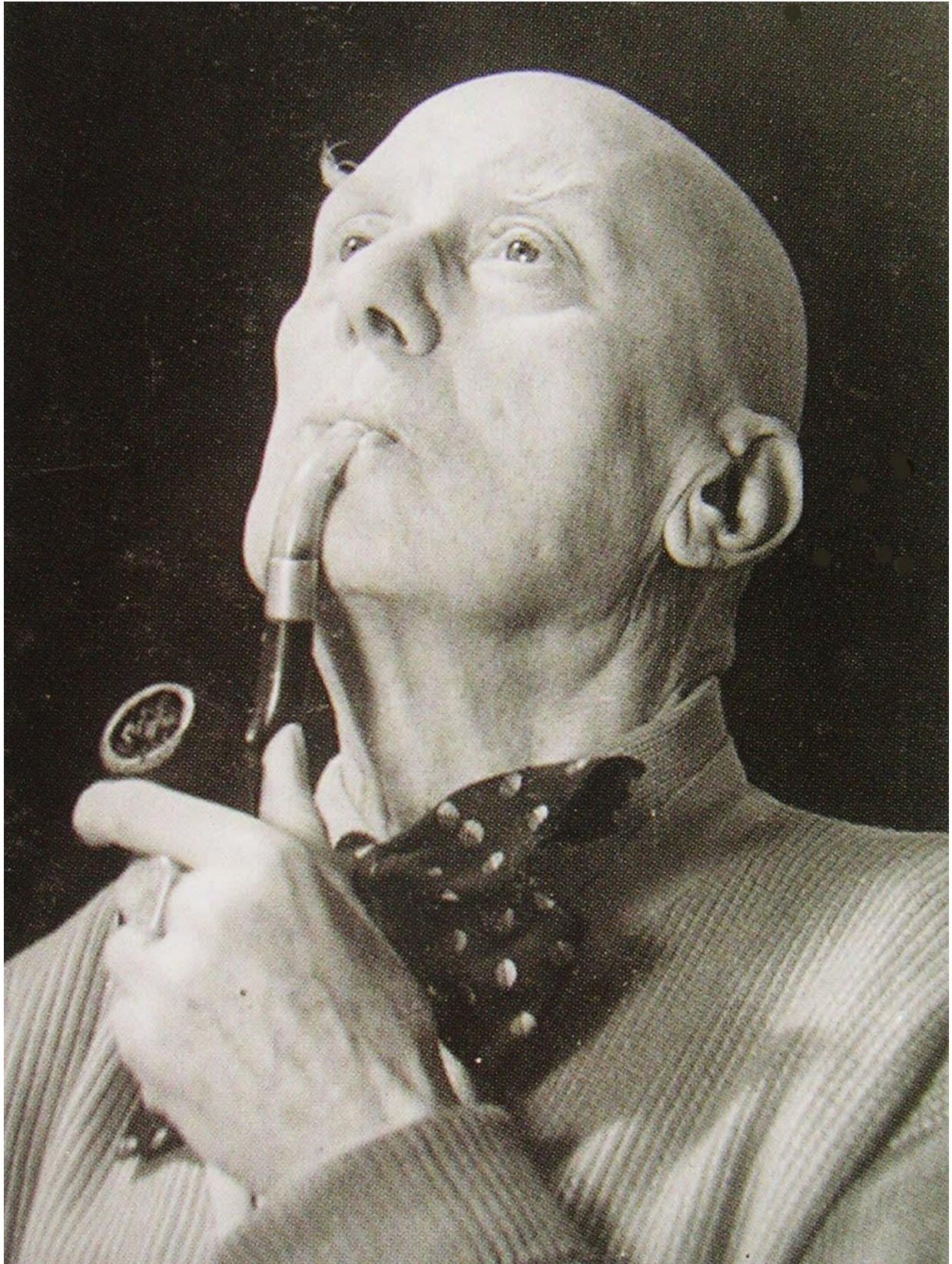


Figure 7: Crowley during his final days

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ackerman, Robert, *The Myth and Ritual School: J.G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists*, New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Adler, Margot, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers and Other Pagans in America*, New York: Penguin Books, 2006 (First published by Viking Press 1979).
- Asprem, Egil, "Kabbalah Recreata: Reception and Adaption of Kabbalah in Modern Occultism," *The Pomegranate* 9.2 (2007):132-153.
- "Magic Naturalized: Negotiating Science and Occult Experience in Aleister Crowley's Scientific Illuminism," *ARIES* 8 (2008):139-165.
- Bailey, Michael D., "The Meanings of Magic," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* (Summer 2006): 1-23.
- Baker, Phil, *Austin Osman Spare: The Life and Legend of London's Lost Artist*, London: Strange Attractor Press, 2011.
- Barton, Blanche, *The Secret Life of a Satanist: The Authorized Biography of Anton LaVey*, Los Angeles: Feral House, 1992.
- Berger, Robert W., "The Devil, the Violin, and Paganini: The Myth of the Violin as Satan's Instrument," *Religion and the Arts* 16 (2012) 305-327.
- Black, Candace, *Satanica Sexualis: An Encyclopedia of Sex and the Devil*, Wet Angel Books, 2012.
- Bogdan, Henrik, "Challenging the Morals of Western Society: The Use of Ritualized Sex in Contemporary Occultism," *The Pomegranate* 8.2 (2006) 211-246.
- and Martin P. Starr (editors), *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*, New



- York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Bruce, Arthur Loring, "Aleister Crowley: Mystic and Mountain Climber," *Vanity Fair*, June 1915, Vol. 4 No. 2, p. 43.
- Butler, Alison, "Magical Beginnings: The Intellectual Origins of the Victorian Occult Revival," *LIMINA* Vol. 9 (2003):78-95.
- Carroll, Peter J., *Liber Null & Psychonaut: An Introduction to Chaos Magic*, San Francisco: Weiser Books, 1987.
- Cavendish, Richard, *The Black Arts*, New York: Perigree Books, 1983 (First published in 1967).
- Crow, John L., "The Bhikkhu and the Magus: Exploring Allan Bennett's Influence on Aleister Crowley," *A paper presented at the CESNUR 2008 International Conference, London, UK*.
- Crowley, Aleister, *Magick: Book Four-Liber ABA*, San Francisco: Weiser Books, 1994. (A compilation of four books that were originally published in 1913, 1930, and 1936).
- *Moonchild*, New York: Avon Books, 1971.
- *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1970.
- D'Amico, Giuliano, "Aleister Crowley Reads Inferno Towards an Occult Reception of Strindberg," *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 84, No. 3, (2012):323-346.
- Davies, Owen, *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Davis, Stephen, *Hammer of the Gods: The Led Zeppelin Saga*, New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 1985.
- Debord, Guy, *Society of the Spectacle*, Detroit: Black and Red, 1983.
- Doherty, Brian, "Do What Thou Wilt: The Individualist Authoritarianism of Aleister Crowley," *REASON* (February 2001):56-58.

- Djurdjevic, Gordan, "Solve et Coagula: Attitudes Toward the Ambrosial Aspects of Human Seed in Certain Yogic Traditions and in the Sexual Magic of Aleister Crowley," *ARIES* 10.1 (2010):85-106.
- Drury, Nevill, *Stealing Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Modern Western Magic*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- The Magical Cosmology of Rosaleen Norton, *The Pomegranate* 12.2 (2010) 208-238.
- The Watkins Dictionary of Magic*, London: Watkins Publishing, 2005.
- Ebeling, Florian (Translated by David Lorton), *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus: Hermeticism from Ancient to Modern Times*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007.
- Edwards, Emily D., *Metaphysical Media: The Occult Experience in Popular Culture*, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University, 2005.
- Evans, Dave, *The History of British Magick After Crowley*, London: Hidden Publishing, 2007.
- Evola, Julius, *The Yoga of Power: Tantra, Shakti, and the Secret Way*, Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1992.
- Feuerstein, Georg, *Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy*, Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1998.
- The Essence of Yoga*, New York: Grove Press, 1976.
- Flood, Gavin, *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory, and Tradition*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2006.
- Flowers, Stephen E., *Lords of the Left-Hand Path: Forbidden Practices & Spiritual Heresies*, Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2012.
- Foucault, Michel (ed. Jeremy R. Carrette), *Religion and Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1999.

- The History of Sexuality: An Introduction-Volume I*, New York: Random House, 1978.
- Freeman, Nick, “Wilde’s Edwardian Afterlife: Somerset Maugham, Aleister Crowley, and *The Magician*,” *Literature & History* 16, Volume 2 (2002):16-28.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang (Translated by Philip Wayne) *Faust/Part One*, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1965.
- Goulter, Tom, “Music, Magic and the Mind,” *Filament*, Issue 9 (2011):14-17.
- Grant, Kenneth, *The Magical Revival*, London: Skoob Books, 1991 (First published in 1972).
- Green, Matthew J.A., “She Brings Apocalypse: Sex, Imagination and Redemptive Transgression in William Blake and the Graphic Novels of Alan Moore,” *Literature Compass* 8/10 (2011): 739-756.
- Greenwood, Susan, *The Anthropology of Magic*, Oxford, UK: Berg, 2009.
- The Encyclopedia of Magic & Witchcraft*, London: Hermes House, 2004.
- Guiley, Rosemary Ellen, *The Encyclopedia of Witches & Witchcraft*, New York: Checkmark Books, 1999.
- Hallett, Jennifer, “Wandering Dreams and Social Marches: Varieties of Paganism in Late Victorian and Edwardian England,” *The Pomegranate* 8.2 (2006):161-183.
- Hanegraaff, Wouter J., “Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, Volume 7/2 (1995): 99-129.
- w/ Jeffrey J. Kripal (editors), *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, Danvers, MA: Fordham University Press, 2011.
- Hessle, Erwin, “The Ethics of Thelema,” *Journal of Thelemic Studies*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (Autumn 2007): 5-13.
- Hill, Douglas (w/ Pat Williams, Frank Smyth, Tessa Clarke), *Witchcraft, Magic and the*

- Supernatural*, Hong Kong: Octopus Books, 1974.
- Hine, Phil, *Condensed Chaos: An Introduction to Chaos Magic*, Tempe, AZ.: The Original Falcon Press, 1995.
- Hutton, Ronald, "Paganism and Polemic: The Debate over the Origins of Modern Pagan Witchcraft," *Folklore*, Vol. 111, No. 1 (Apr., 2000):103-117.
- The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Huxley, Aldous, *The Doors of Perception/Heaven and Hell*, New York: Harper & Row, 1963.
- Jaynes, Julian, *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976.
- Johnson, Marguerite, The Witching Hour: Sex Magic in 1950's Australia, *Journal for the Academic Study of Magic*, Issue 5 (2009): 234-287.
- Jung, Carl Gustav (w/ M.L. von Franz, Joseph L. Henderson, Jolande Jacobi, Aniela Jaffé), *Man and His Symbols*, New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1971.
- Kaczynski, Richard, *Perdurabo: The Life of Aleister Crowley*, Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2010.
- The Weiser Concise Guide to Aleister Crowley*, San Francisco: Weiser Books, 2009.
- Karshner, Edward, "Thought, Utterance, Power: Toward a Rhetoric of Magic," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2011): 52-71.
- Kieckhefer, Richard, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- King, Richard, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*, New York: Routledge, 1999.

- Knowles, Christopher, *Our Gods Wear Spandex: The Secret History of Comic Book Heroes*, San Francisco: Weiser Books, 2007.
- *The Secret History of Rock ‘n’ Roll: The Mysterious Roots of Modern Music*, Berkeley, California: Viva Editions, 2010.
- Kripal, Jeffrey J., *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Lachman, Gary, *Turn Off Your Mind: The Mystic Sixties and the Dark Side of the Age of Aquarius*, New York: Disinformation Company Ltd., 2001.
- *Aleister Crowley: Magick, Rock and Roll, and the Wickedest Man in the World*, New York: Penguin Group, 2014.
- Laderman, Gary, *Sacred Matters*, New York: The New Press, 2009.
- LaVey, Anton Szandor, *The Satanic Bible*, New York: Avon Books, 1969.
- *The Satanic Rituals*, New York: Avon Books, 1972.
- Leary, Timothy, (w/ Ralph Metzner and Richard Alpert), *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1964.
- *Flashbacks: An Autobiography*, New York: Perigree Books, 1983.
- Lingan, Edmund B., “Contemporary Forms of Occult Theatre,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Sept., 2006): 23-38.
- Luck, Georg, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, 2006.
- Luhrmann, Tanya M., *Persuasions of the Witch’s Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Masello, Robert, *Raising Hell: A Concise History of the Black Arts and Those Who Dared to*

- Practice Them*, New York: Perigree Books, 1996.
- McDermott, Rachel and Jeffrey J. Kripal (editors), *Encountering Kali: In the Margins, at the Center, in the West*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003.
- Metzger, Richard (ed.), *The Book of Lies: The Disinformation Guide to Magick and the Occult*, New York: Disinformation Company Ltd., 2003.
- Miles, Christopher, "Journey into the Neither-Neither: Austin Osman Spare and the Construction of a Shamanic Identity," *The Pomegranate* 8.1 (2006) 54-83.
- Morgan, Mogg, "The Heart of Thelema: Morality, Amoralism, and Immortality in Aleister Crowley's Thelemic Cult," *The Pomegranate* 13.2 (2011):163-183.
- Morris, Brian, *Religion and Anthropology: A Critical Introduction*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Morrison, Grant, *Supergods: What Masked Vigilantes, Miraculous Mutants, and a Sun God from Smallville Can Teach Us About Being Human*, New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2011.
- Morrison, Mark, "The Periodical Culture of the Occult Revival: Esoteric Wisdom, Modernity and Counter-Public Spheres," *Journal of Modern Literature* Volume 31, Number 2 (2008):1-22.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich (Translated by Walter Kaufmann), *The Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, London: Penguin Group, 1990.
- *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for None and All*, New York: Penguin Group, 1978.
- Otto, Walter F. (translated by Robert B. Palmer), *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1965.
- Owen, Alex, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.

- Parkin, Lance, *Magic Words: The Extraordinary Life of Alan Moore*, London: Aurum Press, 2013.
- Partridge, Christopher, *The Lyre of Orpheus: Popular Music, The Sacred, & The Profane*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Pasi, Marco and Patricio Ferrari, "Fernando Pessoa and Aleister Crowley: New Discoveries and a New Analysis of the Documents in the Gerald Yorke Collection," *Pessoa Plural: (P./Spr. 2012): 284-313*.
- "The Neverendingly Told Story: Recent Biographies of Aleister Crowley," *ARIES Vol. 3, No. 2 (2003):224-245*.
- Patterson, R. Gary, *Take a Walk on the Dark Side: Rock and Roll Myths, Legends, and Curses*, New York: Fireside, 2004.
- Pearson, Jo, "Inappropriate Sexuality? Sex Magic, S/M and Wicca (or 'Whipping Harry Potter's Arse!')," *Theology & Sexuality 11(2) (2005):31-42*.
- Roszak, Theodore, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969.
- Russell, Jeffrey Burton, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History*, Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Sausman, Justin, "Science, Drugs and Occultism: Aleister Crowley, Henry Maudsley and Late-Nineteenth Century Degeneration Theories," *Journal of Literature and Science 1 (2007): 40-54*.
- Schultes, Richard Evans and Albert Hofmann, *Plants of the Gods: Their Sacred, Healing, and Hallucinogenic Powers*, Rochester, Vermont: Healing Arts Press, 1992.
- Seligmann, Kurt, *Magic, Supernaturalism and Religion*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1948.
- Starr, Martin P., "Chaos from Order: Cohesion and Conflict in the Post-Crowley Occult

- Continuum,” *The Pomegranate* 8.1 (2006):84-117.
- Stivers, Richard, *Evil in Modern Myth and Ritual*, Athens, GA.: University of Georgia Press, 1982.
- Styers, Randall, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, & Science in the Modern World*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Suri, Rochelle, and Daniel B. Pitchford, “The Gift of Life: Death As Teacher in the Aghori Sect,” *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 29(1), (2010):128-134.
- Sutin, Lawrence, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000.
- Stone, Bryan, The Sanctification of Fear: Images of the Religious in Horror Films, *The Journal of Religion and Film*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (October 2001):1-15.
- Storl, Wolf-Dieter, *Shiva: The Wild God of Power and Ecstasy*, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2004.
- Svoboda, Robert E., *Aghora: At the Left Hand of God*, Albuquerque, NM.: Brotherhood of Life, Inc., 1986.
- Tambiah, Stanley J., *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality*, Cambridge, GB.: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Taylor, Rogan P., *The Death and Resurrection Show: From Shaman to Superstar*, London: Anthony Blond, 1985.
- Tillett, Gregory, “Modern Western Magic and Theosophy,” *ARIES* 12 (2012):17-51.
- Tully, Caroline, “Walk Like an Egyptian: Egypt as Authority in Aleister Crowley’s Reception of *The Book of the Law*,” *The Pomegranate* 12.1 (2010):21-48.
- Urban, Hugh B., *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism*,



Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA.: University of California Press, 2006.

———*Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003.

———“The Beast with Two Backs: Aleister Crowley, Sex Magic and the Exhaustion of Modernity,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Volume 7, Issue 3 (2004): 7-25.

———“The Occult Roots of Scientology? L. Ron Hubbard, Aleister Crowley, and the Origins of a Controversial New Religion,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternate and Emergent Religions*, Volume 15, Issue 3 (2012):91-116.

———“The Power of the Impure: Transgression, Violence and Secrecy in Bengali Sakta Tantra and Modern Western Magic,” *NUMEN*, Vol. 50 (2003):269-308.

———“Unleashing the Beast: Aleister Crowley, Tantra and Sex Magic in Late Victorian England,” (2003) [http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeV/Unleashing\\_the\\_Beast.htm](http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeV/Unleashing_the_Beast.htm), 138-192.

Uždavinys, Algis, *Orpheus and the Roots of Platonism*, London: The Matheson Trust, 2011.

Van Vleek, Justin Scott, “The Art of the Law: Aleister Crowley’s Use of Ritual and Drama,” (2003) [http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeV/ArtofLaw\(Old\).htm](http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeV/ArtofLaw(Old).htm), 194-218.

Waite, Gary K., *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003.

Wall, Mick, *When Giants Walked the Earth: A Biography of Led Zeppelin*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008.

Wasserman, James, *In the Center of the Fire: A Memoir of the Occult (1966-1989)*, Lake Worth, FL: Ibis Press, 2012.

Watts, Alan W., *The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness*, New York: Random House, 1962.

———*The Two Hands of God: The Myths of Polarity*, New York: Collier Books, 1969.

White, David Gordon, *Kiss of the Yogini: "Tantric Sex" in its South Asian Contexts*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

———*The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Wilson, Colin, *The Occult*, Herts, GB: Mayflower Books Ltd., 1975.

Wilson, Robert Anton, *Prometheus Rising*, Las Vegas, NV: New Falcon Publications, 1983.

Wyllie, Timothy, *Love Sex Fear Death: The Inside Story of the Process Church of the Final Judgement*, Los Angeles: Feral House, 2009.